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2. — *Conversations on some of the Old Poets*. By JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL. Cambridge: John Owen. 1845. 12mo. pp. 263.

THESE Conversations, as Mr. Lowell states in his "Address to the Reader," lay no claim to the dramatic character. The dialogue form is adopted as a convenient medium through which the opinions of the author may be conveyed. A part of the matter of the book was published, in a different shape, some years since, in a magazine. The writer is an enthusiastic student of the old English poetry. His own poetical style is deeply tinged with the coloring drawn from it; his prose style, also, is enriched and invigorated by the same healthful influence. Though sparkling with too many ornaments, it is generally tasteful and elegant. He chooses his words as Allston chose his colors; and a page of his writing, in the best passages of this work, has the effect of an exquisite picture. Style has evidently been an object on which he has severely exercised his fine powers; and the rich fruits of his manly labors are apparent, we had almost said, more profusely in his prose than in his poetry.

The first and most elaborate of these Conversations is on the writings of Chaucer, who seems to be one of Mr. Lowell's prime favorites, as he must be of all persons of poetic sensibility, who have taken the pains to pierce through the rough outside to the rich and flavorful core. The criticisms on this racy old Londoner are conceived and written with an appreciating warmth of sympathy, which carries the reader pleasantly along the full tide of the critic's enthusiastic eloquence. We hardly know where to look for so thorough and intelligent, as well as so loving, an exposition of the old master. The passages quoted from Chaucer are slightly altered in orthography and phrase; but, although for ourselves we prefer the *ipsissima verba* of the noble old poet to any that may diminish their racy rudeness, it is but justice to the exquisite tact and keen perception of Mr. Lowell to say, that his translations, if such they may be called, preserve the very spirit and flavor, if not the very form and pressure, of the ancient English; and for the purpose which he had in view, it was better, perhaps, to present them in this form, than to take them in their original roughness. All that the critic says, in passing judgment on the transformations of Chaucer by Dryden and Pope, is perfectly true.

The two succeeding dialogues are on the old dramatists, and particularly on Chapman and Ford. They are marked by a fineness, tact, and sympathizing discrimination, similar to that so

admirably displayed in the discussions on Chaucer ; and the passages quoted from their writings cannot fail to excite the reader to make himself further acquainted with them.

The discursive style, permissible in the dialogue, has given Mr. Lowell an opportunity to introduce a number of side discussions, and to throw out a variety of *obiter dicta*, which will not meet with the same degree of approbation as the criticism on the old poets. The uniform and systematic disparagement of Pope is an instance of narrowness into which a man of generous culture ought not to have allowed himself to fall. It is a one-sided and partial judgment, of a character precisely similar to that of the critic who should deny all merit to Chaucer because Chaucer is unlike Pope, or to Gray because Gray is unlike either. Mr. Lowell sometimes condescends to indulge in sneers. A sneer is always unjust and in very bad taste. The "church" comes in for the largest share of his contempt, and the critics next. The ordinary bad taste of a sneer is, in the former instance, increased by its being applied sweepingly to a whole body, and that, too, a body united not by the bonds of any worldly interest, but by the highest concerns of the immortal soul. Mr. Lowell repeatedly declares his contempt for satire and the satirists ; but satire, unamiable as it is, is far less repulsive than a sneer. To speak lightly of what has been long held sacred, and to offend the sincere convictions of men by stinging phrases, do not prove the superior wisdom or the higher honesty of the utterer, but only that he thinks more highly of himself than he ought. As to the critics, that is a matter for the assailant and the assailed to settle between themselves.

Questions of art are sometimes decided by Mr. Lowell in an off-hand manner, which those who know the least about the subject are the most likely to adopt. The beautiful piece of sculpture executed by Mr. Crawford for the Boston Athenæum — one of the very few works which we have in the United States in the highest classical style of the art — is "put down" by an unanswerable sneer concerning Lemprière's Classical Dictionary ; and the great æsthetic question of drapery in sculpture — a question which may well require long study and profound consideration to settle it on its true grounds — is quite summarily despatched, by the usual cant about the improbability of General Washington appearing in a Roman dress before an assembly of his countrymen ; as if sculpture, ancient or modern, were called upon to perpetuate the conceptions of the tailor, the shoemaker, and the hatter ; and as if the pig-tail, the cocked-hat, and the breeches, which have so ludicrously disguised the dignity of the

human form in modern times, must be rendered perdurable, by being sent down to posterity in the eternal marble. The mistake arises from confounding drapery with dress, two things essentially different, and not more different now than they were in the highest bloom of Grecian art. The one is a matter of art, and wholly subservient to artistic effect; the other a matter of personal convenience, and shifting in form and fashion every day. The young gentlemen of Athens no more appeared in the streets in the dresses of the immortal Panathenaic procession on the friezes of the Parthenon, than they rode living horses unsaddled and unbridled, as those figures bestride their marble steeds.

We dwell on these points the more, because Mr. Lowell, in the exuberant confidence of his youthful genius, has, by yielding to the lower and more pugnacious part of his nature, disturbed the delightful effect which his hearty and genial book would otherwise have produced. Cant of all sorts is in the worst taste; he has run away from one sort of it, to fall occasionally into another. The cant of singularity and contempt, the cant of despising established things and settled convictions, merely because they are established and settled, is quite as unworthy of the true man of genius, as the cant of uncompromising conservatism.

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3. — *The Magic Goblet, or the Consecration of the Church of Hammarby.* By MRS. EMILIE CARLEN. Translated from the original Swedish. New York. 1845.

WE have shared in the pleasure so generally diffused in this country by the writings of Frederika Bremer; but if her stories have opened the door for an inundation of such novels as this, we could earnestly wish that her name had never reached our shores. Mrs. Carlen is not destitute of invention. She has made machinery enough, but has forgotten to supply a sufficient motive power. We have followed the development of the narrative with constantly increasing dislike; it is all a wild phantasmagoria of unmixed and unaccountable evil. The good spirit which, in some shape, everywhere prevails in the productions of Miss Bremer, and in whose protection for our favorites we have learned to confide, is, in Mrs. Carlen's wisdom, left out of the account. Evil predominates, and admiring virtue bows before it. Among other scenes described are some love passages with a married man who makes no concealment of his guilt, which are an outrage on all womanly delicacy; and an accidental meeting between the noble and deserted "wife and the beloved," — the